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An in-Depth Investigation of a Model Sport Program for Athletes with a Physical Disability

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ABSTRACT

While previous research highlights the important benefits that sport participation can have for youth development, limited research has examined the sport experiences of athletes with disabilities (Martin, 2006). The purpose of this study was to describe the sport experiences of athletes with physical disabilities in a model swim program that has been widely recognized for the development of positive values in athletes. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight athletes with a physical disability. Participants were both male ($n = 3$) and female ($n = 5$), between 9 - 19 years of age, and averaged 5.9 years of swimming experience. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and were subjected to a content analysis procedure in which raw meaning units were grouped into salient themes (Coté, Salmela, Baria, & Russell, 1993; Tesch, 1990). Athletes' responses regarding the outcomes derived from this program revealed four themes: 1) Redefined capabilities, 2) affirmed sense of self, 3) strengthened social connection, and 4) enhanced acceptance. Social and contextual processes facilitating the development of these outcomes are also discussed. Practical implications for programmers, coaches, and athletes are presented along with recommendations for future sport research.

KEYWORDS

Positive Youth Development; Coaching; Peers

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